

Conceptualising Social Change: Family, Work and the Changing Pattern of Social Reproduction

Sarah Irwin

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Introduction

Integral to changes in the moral ordering of parenting and partnering are processes shaping change in family and household forms, patterns of employment and welfare claims. The focus of this paper, on changing divisions of labour and modes of household resourcing, is intended as a vehicle for exploring interrelated developments in family and employment over recent decades. The nature of this inter-relation is a theme throughout much of the literature in the area.

Developments in respect of gender and life course related claims and obligations and patterns of interdependence and mutuality provide another theme for the paper. These impact on changes in the configuration of employment and familial / household relations. These issues are dominant themes within a wide literature on change in family life and patterns of employment at the turn of the twenty first century. In rather broad terms the debates cleave into two sets of arguments. In one there is a view that contemporary changes can be theorised within a trend model, in which prior social forms are broken up, and a process of individualisation is seen to herald a transition to a new kind of social ordering under the heading of late modernity. In the other 'take' there is a much more detailed engagement with empirical process, but perhaps undue modesty in respect of theoretical reconstruction, especially in conceptualising those processes shaping new forms of diversity and inequality.

Gender and life course related processes are useful organising themes for reviewing and discussing the literature and evidence on patterns of change throughout much of this paper. Gender in particular is the dominant theme in most interpretations of change within the sociological literature, and a key theme within social demographic theorising. Further, we can as a starting point take gender and life course differentiation as salient markers of social location and relational differences. These attributes of social location are not simply referring to locations 'within' the household, but are key elements within macro level analysis of change in the organisation of social reproduction. The categories gender, life course and generation remain important in a reconstructed framework for conceptualising social change but they are not definitive statements of social similarity and difference. Rather they are markers of more general processes of claiming which are themselves crucial in shaping social relations and social inequalities.

I will discuss research under the headings individualisation, continuity and change in gendered relations to employment and to household resourcing, and, thirdly, life course perspectives. I will also consider recent comparative research on work, welfare and issues of gender and then offer

steps towards a reconstructed framework for advancing our understanding of, and ability to interrogate, the nature of recent developments in patterns of parenting and partnering and in social reproduction more generally. The final section offers a summary of key issues salient to such a reconstruction.

Background

Changing patterns of partnering and parenting are defined, in our research, as offering a lens through which to look at the interconnectedness of changes in the spheres of family, work and nation. The relation between the 'spheres' of family and work, as specific components of the organisation of reproduction and production, is a theme which dominates much research into contemporary social transformations. Here I outline some of these developments in family and work by way of background to the rest of the paper.

Recent decades have seen a series of significant demographic developments which, for some commentators, reveal a transformation in patterns of relational and reproductive behaviour. Rates of fertility declined and stabilised at below replacement levels in Britain, as across many European countries. Patterns of deferral in the timing of parenthood and increased rates of childlessness have contributed to changing fertility patterns. There has been a growth in cohabitation and in the proportion of births outside marriage; significant increases in divorce rates, particularly marked in Britain at least until the early 1990s, and a significant increase in the proportion of families headed by a lone parent. Additionally there have been significant changes in patterns of employment. There has been a changing balance in the relative dominance of service over manufacturing employment, with the latter now accounting for 75% of employment (a 15% increase since 1979). There has been significant growth in part time employment and in rates of female employment. Key developments in respect of employment patterns include a growing concentration of employment amongst those aged 25 to 55, and an intensification of employment during this period of the life course. This intensification is occurring at the level of households, with partnered women more likely to work when their children are young, and with a growing concentration of employment in 'work-rich', two earner households and a decline in the proportion of single earner households. There has also been a growth in income inequality through the 1980s and 90s. [The companion paper reviews the developments here and details key references]

There have been quite significant changes in patterns of household composition over recent decades, new kinds of life course trajectory and new patterns of diversity in 'typical' living arrangements. Anderson's (1985) characterisation of the emergence of a normalised life course through the twentieth century up to the 1970s had an already dated feel to it, and debates about fragmentation and individualism have become as characteristic of discussion of changing life course dynamics as they have of change in family relations.

Changes in the structure of employment opportunity are, for many authors, linked to the re-ordering of household composition and familial relations. As we will see, some have characterised new forms of diversity in terms of a fragmentation of prior family forms and an apparent inability of current conceptual categories to grasp or illuminate the nature of contemporary developments. Some writers have stressed how new forms of diversity reflect a pattern of social polarisation and loss of social cohesion. For example, reflecting on Britain's

rates of divorce, its incidence of lone parenthood, and its rates of teenage pregnancy, all high by European standards, Coleman and Chandola (1999: 63) comment that:

“Britain's distinctiveness in European demography, which once mirrored a leading position in Europe's society and economy, now instead reflects Britain's disadvantage”.

McRae, in summarising the findings of the associated (Population and Household Change) research programme echoes these comments stressing the ways in which inequalities are integral to changing family and demographic behaviours and citing Britain as a 'worst case example' of change and its consequences (McRae 1999).

Individualisation

A number of theorists have, influentially, presented contemporary social changes in family demography as a reflection of a transition to late modernity. In this perspective we are witnesses to a diminution of historically important obligations and constraints, and an entrenchment of individualism (eg. Beck 1992, Giddens, 1991, Bauman 1995). Here a new moral ordering of parenting and partnering reveals a greater contingency of familial relationships, borne of processes of marketisation of female labour (Beck 1992) or borne of cultural trends which privilege claims to contract and equality over status and hierarchy (eg. MacInnes 1998; Lesthaeghe 1995).

The term individualisation is generally used to signify a diminution in the strength and permanence of social ties and obligations which previously bound people into groups, networks and allegiances which were crucial to their social experiences and identities. Many have argued that emergent trends in family demography, and new forms of diversity in family arrangements, can be understood in terms of a growth in individualism and a change in the nature of the social, or moral ties that bind individuals and groups in contemporary society (eg. Aries 1980; Lesthaeghe 1995; Beck 1992; Bauman 1995; MacInnes 1998). The emphasis on individualism, or the changing relationship of the individual to the contemporary social environment, is seen to help account for new forms of diversity in family structure (eg. McRae 1997) and, for some writers, a greater autonomy of individuals and freedom (or a new need) to be authors of their own biographies and lifestyles (eg. Beck 1992; Lesthaeghe 1995; Strohmeier and Kuijsten 1997). Traditional status constraints with respect to gender are weakening and, for some, the commodification of female labour is paralleled by a growing contingency of family relationships. In this way, social ties give way to the logic of capital accumulation which consequently draws in cheaper female labour. Beck argues that a consequence is the marketisation of family relationships, and a growing contradiction between reproduction and production, or between the spheres of family and work (Beck 1992). Family relationships are undermined and increasingly contingent. In a parallel argument MacInnes maintains that a long term process of rationalization in the cultural sphere draws women into the labour market on similar terms to men - and this too transforms the basis of demographic behaviours and familial ties (MacInnes 1998).

There are a number of difficulties with the above accounts. Some are informed directly by analysis of data on the relationship between changing normative structures and changing demographic behaviours (MacInnes 1998, Lesthaeghe 1995) yet there is limited theorisation of the relationship between them. Generally the accounts offer a problematic theorisation of the

individual / society relationship. They rely on assertions of commodification and long run 'logics' which are construed as undermining prior, 'social' relations. We need to consider the paradox that these 'new' accounts hold parallels with older, economic, accounts of the nature of individuals behaviour. The collapse of prior social and cultural ties and constraints appear to give way to an economically rational individual, familiar from neoclassical economic theory. In both perspectives people appear to be individualised decision-making units, a view which oddly absents culture from accounts of contemporary social action (eg. Irwin 1995, Irwin and Bottero 2000, Gardiner 1996, Duncan and Edwards 1999. See also Oppenheimer 1994; Block 1990; van Krieken 1997). The notion that female labour is being 'commodified' raises difficulties since the labour of young and older workers is being 'decommodified'. Commodification is an economic process which should not admit 'social' boundaries. It is my argument that we need an alternative framework for explaining the alteration in the social terrain of gender relations. Aspects of individualisation may be a particularistic manifestation of a broader reconfiguration of social relations. Individuals are bound together within a constellation of social relations from which they draw meaning and which they help reproduce. *The issue can be better construed as one of defining the reconfiguration of these social relations rather than accept either the notion of a weakening of such relations or, indeed, a radical restructuring of such relations. I would argue that it is as an integral part of this reconfiguration that there is emerging a new set of norms and evaluations informing contemporary moral codes.*

Work and Family: Empirical Research on Continuity and Change in Employment Patterns and Relations to Household Resourcing and Reproduction

In contrast to the literature discussed above there is a wide array of literature which puts detailed empirical research at the heart of its analyses of changing patterns of employment and of women's and men's familial roles and responsibilities. This research offers a rather different take on the relationship between productive and reproductive 'spheres'. The dominant (although not sole) emphasis here has been on patterns of continuity in aspects of gender inequalities. The research has been principally concerned with the articulation of family and employment in the context of change, especially in female patterns of employment participation, and emergent patterns of gender related social inequality. The general picture which arises from research is one of significant change in rates of employment amongst women but, for the majority, continuity of their disadvantaged position within the labour market (eg. Humphries and Rubery 1992; Joshi and Hinde 1993; Harrop and Moss 1995; Arber and Ginn 1995; Glover and Arber 1995; Hakim 1996; Ginn et al 1996). This research stressed patterns of polarisation in women's experiences although there has been a slight shift of emphasis towards the new articulation of family and employment, and a stress on new forms of diversity as well as polarisation (eg. Walby 1997; Crompton 1997; Crompton f/c).

Broad connections have been made between changing patterns of employment and changing family forms (eg. McRae 1997; 1999; Walby 1997; Crompton 1999; Rubery et al 1999). So, for example, changing demographic patterns have facilitated change in women's patterns of labour force participation. However, within this literature we are witnesses to a pattern of polarisation in which the majority of women are tied into the same constraining familial relationships and their changing relation to employment reveals continuities of disadvantage, rather than a transformation of opportunity. Indeed the polarisation of women's employment opportunities is a key trend which is identified across the literature (eg. Walby 1997, Rubery et al 1999). There has been a marked divergence in the employment rates of mothers depending on their occupational

level and their level of formal education (eg. Glover and Arber 1995; McRae, 1991; Harrop and Moss, 1995). Women with very young children have increased their employment participation rates across the social spectrum. The majority of such women are in low paid part time jobs whilst a small, relatively advantaged group of women, maintain their employment in high paying high status work since they have sufficient resources to protect themselves from the standard consequences of motherhood for employment prospects (Ginn et al 1996). The general vulnerability of women continues by virtue of their earning power being structured in relation to assumptions of their financial dependence within the family (Arber and Ginn 1995; Ward, Dale and Joshi 1996). In comparative context similarly one can identify changes within an overall pattern of continuity: so for example the greater representation of women in managerial positions reflects scope for advance in specialist niches rather than any significant increase in organisational authority (Crompton and Le Feuvre 1996).

Continuity of women's relative disadvantage has been a watchword of much research over the last decade along with a possibly growing emphasis on complexity and diversity. There are a number of issues which arise from the research. It is empirically rich and has been very valuable in challenging notions of gender equalisation. However, it may be that the agenda of issues surrounding in/equality, whilst immensely important, do not fully capture the nature of changes in gender relations over recent decades. Most of the commentators cited note a pattern of economic polarisation amongst women, with some suggesting that some - privileged - women have been amongst the main beneficiaries of social and economic change over recent decades (Rubery et al 1999; Egerton and Savage). Since many of the female 'gainers' are attached to advantaged men, the issue of change in gender relations is clearly inseparable from change in patterns of inter-household inequality. However, another part of the story is the restructuring of women's and men's claims on employment, and the relative sufficiency of a single wage in household income maintenance. To describe some of the developments here it is useful to draw on some empirical evidence suggestive of a growing importance of both partners' earnings to the resourcing of couple households, and of associated changes in women's and men's claims to employment over the life course.

Arber and Ginn (1995) argued that work and family are autonomous spheres, with apparent advances in women's labour market position failing to translate into commensurate advances in their relative position within the family. Here continuity appeared the watchword in respect of gender differences when analysed at the level of the household. However, an alternative take revealed that women's position in respect of household resourcing has changed quite substantially. Analysis of General Household Survey data for the years 1973 and 1993 showed a very significant increase in the earnings of women working full time relative to those of their husbands (Irwin, 1999). The percentage of full time working women in couple households who earned as much or more than their partners rose from 15% in 1973 to 44% in 1993. Revisiting empirical evidence revealed not a contradiction between changes in employment and in household patterns of earning, but rather consistency. In respect of part time employment it is clear that increased participation rates do not equate with radical change in the relative position of women in the labour market, or undermine conventional divisions of labour in domestic responsibilities. However, it does appear that even part time earnings are increasingly important in household resourcing particularly amongst households in relatively disadvantaged circumstances (Machin and Waldfogel 1994). Some researchers have also suggested that there may be a general modification of the breadwinner mode of household resourcing due to the growing concentration of employment in couple headed families where both partners are employed, and a declining proportion of families resourced by a single wage (Machin and

Waldfoegel 1994, Rubery 1996, Brannen et al 1998). Evidence suggests that at the lower end of the earnings distribution the family income package increasingly comprises two secondary wages, neither sufficient on its own to maintain the family at an adequate level of living. The evidence remains consistent with arguments of polarisation in the experience of women, and across households, but it is suggestive of a set of changes not adequately reflected in research which is *framed* by the issue of gender equalisation.

It is also pertinent here to highlight the problems which ensue from presuming that labour market position is an adequate statement of a person's position of relative advantage or disadvantage. Rather we need to address changing claims to employment as they relate to changing locations in the order of social reproduction, and in respect of the changing relations of obligation and claiming which bind gender, life course and generational groups.

Empirical research has been valuable in describing developments in female employment patterns and in illuminating some of the consequences of these developments but less attention has been directed towards conceptualising the underlying causal processes. In respect of theorising change in patterns of employment and related changes in patterns of family composition and family demography various factors have been cited, often presented in the form of a list. Key developments include change in the nature of labour demand, and in labour supply. Changes in labour demand are considered to include commodification, and the search by capital for cheaper and more flexible sources of labour. Additionally the growth of the service sector is seen to have facilitated this shift. In respect of change in labour supply a number of key features may be cited. These include change in the availability of women as a source of labour, in turn facilitated by change in the duration of childbearing and rearing commitments over a woman's life; change in norms regarding the employment of women (especially mothers of young children); change in patterns of education increasing the value of women to employers and women's own aspirations for independence; decline in the relative level and adequacy of single wages for family resourcing with a concomitant growth in the importance of female earnings for household income maintenance; and women's claims to greater autonomy and social participation being reflected in the labour market and the family (eg. Humphries and Rubery, 1992; Machin and Waldfoegel, 1994; Harrop and Moss, 1995; Scott, Alwin and Brown, 1996; Walby 1997; Rubery et al 1999).

The above factors are variously cited as key for understanding patterns of demographic change as well as for understanding change in the articulation of employment and current relations to family and care based commitments. However, a number of issues arise from these sorts of lists of causal factors. One is that there has been relatively little work on theorising connections between them, and their salience in respect of different facets of family life and familial relations under investigation. The assumptions underpinning assertions of the salience of these variables too, has perhaps been inadequately explored. For example, recent decades reveal the growing importance to women's employment opportunities of educational qualifications (eg. Walby 1997; Rubery et al 1999). Yet, we need to ask why the *value* of education has changed in this way. Rubery and her colleagues note that across many European countries women remain overqualified relative to men in comparable jobs, and that women receive lower returns to education than do men. Qualifications then do not appear more adequate than before as an indicator of 'human capital', and so their significance to women's employment position and to related patterns of demographic behaviour are still in need of explanation.

Additionally, in respect of changed norms and values which surround changing employment patterns, and their articulation with familial obligations, there have clearly been significant changes. For example, evidence on patterns of change in female employment amongst women with young children suggests that rather than parenthood being an obstacle to labour force participation it may, in a number of circumstances, be seen increasingly as an obligation of parenthood - to contribute to raising children at a standard of living only attainable through two sets of earnings (and consistent with the desire by many women to have a level of autonomy and independence afforded by paid employment). Yet discussions and conceptualisation of changing norms in respect of these issues turn on a limited and familiar set of attitudinal statements (eg. Scott et al 1998; Scott 1999; Hakim 1996 for review). These may give some insights into change at an aggregate level yet there is a risk of imposing meanings on respondents where, for example, questions have limited salience to them. Attitudinal statements can offer useful insights but the ways in which they are set up often means that they do little more than touch on very particular facets of normative issues. There is a need for more nuanced kinds of questions which tap into issues as they are salient to respondents, and which facilitate theoretical development in terms of normative and evaluative issues.

There has been a growing scepticism over the value of monolithic theoretical frameworks which previously endeavoured to capture the workings of social systems as a whole, and we can observe a repeated stress on diversity and complexity (eg. Walby 1997, and see Bottero 2000). Crompton argues that, to better understand new patterns of gender relations and roles, we need to embrace apparently contradictory perspectives and take a pluralist approach that works with different explanatory frameworks (Crompton, 1999). Hakim has argued that diversity in women's employment means that no one theory can cover all its aspects (Hakim 1996). Hakim foregrounds the importance of choice in explaining patterns of difference in female labour force participation, a claim which has encouraged a series of rebuttals (eg Ginn et al 1996; Rubery et al 1999). However, for some critics, the reluctance to develop general, unified theoretical arguments about the nature of contemporary developments has allowed models of individualism, fragmentation and indeterminacy to take over the running (Bottero 2000). *Recognition of diversity and complexity is not matched by the development of conceptual frameworks for interpreting the processes generating emergent patterns.*

Certainly, in respect of developments in parenting and partnering it is not difficult to uncover analytical uncertainties facing researchers in their interrogations of recent changes. In particular issues arise regarding the specification of the link between normative and evaluational changes and 'material' social and economic changes. In their account of single (never married) motherhood Berthoud and his colleagues note that much of the debate around lone parenthood has taken place in the absence of adequate understandings of the nature of its growth (Berthoud et al 1999). The authors conclude that, since their quantitative data analysis indicated upward trends have not been caused by changes in social and economic structures, "[T]his leaves a change in social norms as the most likely explanation" (p.372). The authors are referring to change in patterns of acceptability of lone parenthood, in particular changes in the outcomes of women conceiving outside a married couple relationship. Their conclusion clearly begs a question as to how to locate and conceptualise changing norms if they are treated as autonomous from 'material' arrangements. In respect of growing rates of divorce, the common enquiry into whether it is explicable in terms of women's increased employment rates, has drawn a conclusion to the negative, certainly such patterns do not offer a direct causal explanation. For example Kiernan and Mueller (1999) conclude the central importance of proximate factors but are reluctant to elaborate the changing terrain on which such factors alter their salience. In exploring

the increasing likelihood of breakdown of couple unions, McKay notes that whilst some demographic characteristics make a difference, "...the main effect seems to be one of an inexplicable trend increase which cannot straightforwardly be the effect of more mothers working" (McKay 1998, p.120). In respect of a range of changes in household living arrangements through the 1980s, including increases in rates of cohabitation, in rates of divorce and in independent living, Clarke and Henwood argue that "it remains to be seen" to what extent these changes are influenced by economic, social or attitudinal change, or by various combinations of these factors (Clarke and Henwood 1997). This issue, though, has been important throughout discussions in the area. It may well be time to reshape the question being asked. The crucial question remains as to how we are to locate normative changes if they are unrelated to 'material' changes. I would suggest that these kinds of accounts offer a rather limited take on the nature of social and economic change, and in their conceptions of normative change, and that they are too hasty in construing these as separate domains.

Most social scientists distance themselves from forms of economic determinism, or indeed, sometimes, from structural explanation. Normative change therefore is given a fairly central place in explanation, but it is generally counterposed to material change. We need to advance an understanding in which there is a more adequate theorisation of the link between normative and 'material' change. If evidence of normative judgements and material circumstances do not appear to correspond then we need to look very closely at our interpretation of those material circumstances. *Indeed a more nuanced understanding of perceptions and values can itself contribute to a progressive reconstruction of theoretical categories, including a more adequate specification of social arrangements* (eg. Siltanen 1994; Holmwood and Stewart 1991).

Before going on to elaborate some steps to an alternative theoretical reconstruction it is helpful to explore some parallel issues in the domain of welfare and the life course.

Life Course Perspectives

The question of change in the shape and meaning of life course trajectories is another crucial component of any analysis of the changing articulation of family and employment. It also raises issues crucial to welfare, in respect both of formal welfare arrangements and of patterns of welfare as well-being. The 'modern life course' emerged very much as a product of modern systems of welfare, including importantly the extension of compulsory education and of retirement and pension provisioning. There emerged a broad life course pattern around the tripartite structure of [childhood | independent adulthood | later life] or [school | work/family | retirement]. Writers identified a 'normalisation' of patterns up to the 1960s at least, with convergence towards particular patterns of behaviour - at least in respect of the timing and incidence of crucial life course transitions. This applied to patterns of entry to and exit from the labour force, and to patterns of marriage and parenthood (Anderson 1985). Diversity across the population appeared to be lessening. Subsequently divergence appears to have been the order of the day. *It is this emergence of new life course patterns, with change in the nature of 'typical' trajectories and change in the 'distribution of normality' which is generating new issues for policy makers and theorists.*

Some argue that contemporary changes in life course patterns herald the end of the modern life course (eg. Bauman 1995, Castells 1996, Guillemard 1992). The apparent disruptions of prior life course patterns are seen to bear witness to social fragmentation and the dissolution of social

ties and relationships. Writers such as Beck speak of individualisation heralding a new kind of 'elective' biography in which people become authors of their own biographies in an unprecedented way. An alternative perspective would both reconsider the processes shaping life course staging, and continue to interrogate patterns of inter-dependence and mutuality which continue to bind social groups (eg. Irwin 1996, 1999c). These suggest a change in the relative positioning of generations, and of women and men at different life course stages.

There has been growing recognition of the salience of life course dynamics in policy analysis. Life course issues have been long recognised as crucial - indeed they were part of the background to twentieth century welfare settlements. However there is a renewed recognition of their potential significance within debates about a welfare resettlement (Falkingham and Hills 1995; Hills 1997; Leisering and Walker 1998). Also, the availability of relatively sophisticated data sets and the means of handling very large quantities of data, and undertaking longitudinal analyses, has facilitated new insights into the life course dimensions of social experience. Additionally, a recent redirection of researchers away from analysis of the experience of 'groups' and towards analysis of trajectories and patterns of movement into and out of various circumstances, has highlighted the importance of 'dynamic analysis' at least at the level of the individual (eg. Leisering and Walker 1998b; also see for examples the references under lone parenthood heading in the companion paper).

In respect of change in patterns of parenting and partnering we might, from what is commonly known as the 'life course perspective' highlight some issues:

- There have been important changes in the timing and incidence of life course events, and in their spread across the population;
- There are newly emergent patterns of movement through different familial ties, obligations and claims on material and caring resources over the life course;
- The life course of families have changed with new patterns of family formation and dissolution;
- There are new patterns of employment in which insecurity and job mobility appear more general now than in the past. Additionally, perceptions of insecurity are important and may impact on peoples plans and current behaviour.

Ellwood stresses the need for dynamic policy making which would be more sensitive to life trajectories, and recognise the crucial transitions in individuals' lives that indicate points where support would make a difference. Policies are required that build on the agency of people in need and aim at resourcing capabilities (Ellwood 1998). This is echoed by Leisering and Walker (1998b: 278):

“The new agenda points towards a differentiated policy targeted on specific events, transitions and episodes in people's lives rather than a policy designed with regard to static and aggregate problem groups such as 'the' unemployed, lone parents or 'the' elderly. It is a policy strategy that builds on the agency of those in need, a pro-active policy aiming to identify critical points of intervention early in problem careers”.

Thus, the authors argue, “Social justice has to be redefined and specified with reference to the dimension of time” (p.281). Leisering and Walker (1998a) argue that social policy systems contribute to establishing relationships between the different stages of the life course and therefore integrate it. This is a fair account but also a partial one - they note how, for example, education in youth enhances life chances in adulthood, or how systems of insurance can smooth

lifetime variation in income and outgoings - in other words, the stress on integration is based on an individual level analysis and on lifetime continuities. The issue arises as to whether a dynamic approach is one which can not only deal with the dynamics of individual lifetimes but with the restructuring of lifetime trajectories, and with the articulation of life course processes and structures of inequality and social integration. There remains a need for a more nuanced theoretical account of this relationship. We can, for example, point to ways in which changes in life course related claims to independence, and changing patterns of interdependence between different life course groups, have generated new patterns of social inequality. For example, the undermining of young adults claims to independence over recent decades has been cited as an aspect of young men's disadvantage consequent on recent changes, yet this is inappropriately generalising. After all, the development has, for many, been an aspect of advantage, as their resource claims are met by others (principally, parents). However, for those in non-standard circumstances, such developments have underpinned new forms of disadvantage and marginalisation (For a discussion of the interaction of life course processes and structures of inequality in relation to transitions from youth to adult status, see Irwin 1995, and in relation to later life see Irwin 1999c).

The dimension of time, then, is crucial, in that it foregrounds the salience of emergent life course patterns and issues as core to the design of welfare strategies fit for contemporary needs and aspirations. However, the social structuring of life course processes needs a more adequate understanding. In particular the ways in which such processes relate to patterns of inequality and social integration are key, yet under-theorised. It is this kind of gap, the apparent autonomy of life course processes and processes shaping inequality, which allowed Giddens (1994: 196) to argue that:

“Existing welfare systems can be reconstructed so as to disentangle 'life-cycle' provision from the objective of reducing structural inequalities - in particular, the objective of preventing the formation of excluded underclasses”.

However Giddens appears to neglect how, in practice, the most significant redistributive effect of state welfare is not from affluent people to poor people, but rather a redistribution across the life course: a dimension which may be key to sustaining an inclusive welfare project. Hills estimates that three quarters of welfare state benefits are self financed (through taxation) over people's lifetimes rather than paid for by others (Hills 1997). The question arises as to whether the life course 'savings bank' effect provides the basis for a generalised commitment to welfare. From this perspective a welfare system which offers security and some measure of redistribution, and merges self interest with a commitment to the common good, stills require an *integral* solution to life course and other sources of inequality.

A concern that arises from the new stress on diversity is that it risks leading away from general undertakings in the shape of minimum standards that are sufficient to allow full social participation on the part of welfare claimants. For example, Rubery and her colleagues, in noting the trend towards more means testing, and the limited support for parents to reconcile work and family life, warn:

"The danger is that current policies will promote the principles of employment and self support without providing the framework of either a large welfare state or a stable family system to guarantee a secure environment for those in need of care. The fragmentation of family systems is coinciding with the cutback of collective social provision, leaving a

vacuum to be filled by an individualised, market based system of care provision in which inequalities between and within sexes and generations will be reinforced" (Rubery et al 1999, p. 167, see also Walker 1999).

Culture, Claiming and Changing Social Relations: Re-theorising Changes in Family and Employment Relations

The specificity of the UK is thrown into sharp relief through cross-national comparisons. The literature here stresses in particular the importance of cross-cultural variation and historical patterns of claiming and compromise which have led to very different outcomes, both in terms of institutionalised systems and in terms of norms and evaluations of the 'appropriate' roles of different groups and how these articulate with employment, family and welfare systems. The companion paper offers some details on key cross national similarities and differences in a European context.

In the foregoing discussion of issues of gender and the articulation of family roles and changing claims on employment, it was noted that there is some ambiguity over the link between normative, evaluative developments in these domains and 'material' changes. There is a tendency to move away from overarching theoretical statements to pulling together a range of 'structural' and 'individualistic' explanations, and of 'material' and attitudinal causal factors. However, recent comparative research drawing on ideas about gender cultures, offers another 'take' on social change, highlighting again its systemic nature, and its cultural embeddedness (eg. Pfau Effinger 1994, 1998; Duncan 1994). The research focuses on the need to better understand processes shaping change and diversity in the organisation of social reproduction. These writers draw on the notion of gender contract (after Hirdmann). For Pfau-Effinger (1994: 1359):

“the orientations and actions of women and men in a social system or subsystem are founded on a gender contract; that is, a sociocultural consensus about the respective organisation of interaction between the sexes”.

Although in a later paper Pfau-Effinger appears to have pulled away from this consensual model, noting alternative and competing value systems within society (1998) she still arguably overstates the significance of consensus and overt contestation of social arrangements as core to theorising social change (Irwin and Bottero 2000). The models of gender contract are used by Pfau Effinger and by Duncan to elaborate shifts in the kind of employment participation / family care regimes which characterise different countries and change over time. Duncan suggests that Britain is in a transitional phase, leaving behind a 'housewife contract', but without a new pattern yet clearly established (Duncan 1994). Pfau Effinger has focused on the different trajectories of the German, Finnish and Dutch 'regimes' as patterns of late twentieth century transformation can be related to different cultural traditions. In particular, she emphasises the role of the urban bourgeoisie in modernisation, and the cultural hold of the associated breadwinner/carer family model. Pfau Effinger notes the recent re-negotiations of gender arrangements across her case study countries, with new ideals based increasingly on the notion of the employed mother, and with changes primarily initiated by women.

The approach usefully draws attentions to patterns of claiming as well as to the value of locating 'material' changes in the articulation of employment and family as embedded in cultural processes. However, whilst framing the issues in terms of gender alerts us to a range of issues it

may be that it forecloses other, linked, questions. For example, rather than take gender as a starting point for exploring related divisions of labour, issues of gender and their particular salience and articulation in different societal contexts might themselves be construed in terms of claiming. I have advocated elsewhere a moral economy perspective which goes beyond notions of gender contract by offering a framework in which gender, as a socially significant category, can itself be understood as bound up with claiming processes. Also the perspective allows us to analyse and locate shifting gender relations as elements of social changes even though gender itself is not always a dominant organising principle of change. We must not understate the importance of changes in gendered positions and gendered claims in the current restructuring of social relations: the point is that the moral economy framework is not defined and delimited by gender issues but rather can help to locate such issues within a set of broader social relationships. A number of writers have stressed the conscious articulation of claiming - as a political process (Jenson 1986; Pederson 1993; Daune-Richard 1998). However, we need to engage also with the link between claims and context, that claims may be as much a product as a cause of social change (cf. Peattie and Rein 1983). It is therefore crucial to stress the importance of social arrangements which alter the grounds for different claims, and for appeals to certain truths, and which alter the relative power of different groups in making claims. *The claims of women to independence and autonomy are an important constituent part of change in patterns of participation in education and employment, and of change in family demography, but the strengthening of these claims can be understood only in relation to changing gendered positions in social reproduction over the long run. Current changes in divisions of labour and in relations to family and employment reflect a reconfiguration of the relative positioning of different social groups. This leads to a repositioning in respect of the (implicit) claims that are met in their reproduction, as well as altering the grounds through which new (explicit) claims may emerge and take on force.* In short, the perspective embraces both explicit processes of claiming, but also ones which are implicit in the structure of social arrangements, and in associated norms and patterns of evaluation. For example, changes in household and family structure, and changes in divisions of labour between women and men, and across generations, have altered these groups' relations to one another in the resourcing of everyday life, altered their claiming positions, and changed their identities in important ways. In short, claims are embedded within contemporary arrangements and may - or may not - be consciously articulated and reflected upon. They may for example, reflect an historical embeddedness of prior processes of claiming. They may simply appear as part of the 'natural' order of things.

Two, linked, examples serve to illustrate how claims may be embedded in our ideas of the natural, and become as much a part of academic and policy discourse, as of general understandings. The first example refers to the frequently stated preference to emphasise relations of inter-dependence over the terminology of dependence and independence. This holds value, yet we need also to keep sight of the fact that the terms *dependence* and *independence* articulate broader social evaluations of the worth of different activities, and the worth of different groups' claims to recognition and a proper share of the social wage. For example - that some work is paid and some is not paid - could not provide a clearer reflection of such evaluations. In turn this reflects the outcome of various processes of claiming. In such a way both 'dependence' and 'independence' can be located in relation to processes of claiming, in particular to claims about value. They are positioned on the same conceptual plane - as they are in accounts of interdependence - yet they can also be seen as marking out different positions in relation to broader evaluations and norms regarding the value of different activities and the social input and rights of different social groups. The other example refers to the notion of welfare claims. These are commonly interpreted as sets of claims upon state welfare, and 'welfare subject' comes to

signify either a particular kind of individual, or a particular social location. However, clearly all make claims upon welfare in various ways, in both the public sphere or through private or occupational welfare arrangements. Further, it is a mark of privilege is to have one's claim recognised as a right rather than a claim on welfare. We might also stress the ways in which welfare claims, broadly construed, are also embedded in employment systems. *The claiming framework requires us to interrogate the social nature of the boundary typically drawn between work and welfare, as well as between dependence and independence. It also helps in articulating the mutuality of 'material' and 'normative' processes.* It does so by allowing us to interrogate evaluative judgements, and sets of beliefs, as integral to the ordering of social arrangements. Since norms and the patterning of social relations are linked in complex and indirect ways the framework does not offer a 'map' of changing social arrangements but it does offer a potentially productive route to better interrogating the processes which shape such change.

Key Issues

In offering pointers towards a reconstructed framework for interrogating social change it is my argument that:

- Change in gender and life course relations, and linked changes in the pattern of claims and obligations through which individuals and families resource and reproduce themselves, allow us to locate emergent patterns of parenting and partnering in relation to a re-structuring, not a 'de-structuring' of social relations. We are witnesses to a reconfiguration of social relations, and patterns of inter-dependence across social groups;
- Change in the organisation of social reproduction, including changes in family resourcing - and in the structure of the social wage more generally - are reflected in the restructuring of inter-dependencies or in a new patterning of social locations and identities. What we are witnesses to, then, is
 1. a restructuring of claims and obligations which binds groups in society
 2. the emergence of new patterns of vulnerability in relation to welfare
 3. emergent patterns in family demography and in related patterns of inter-dependence which both reflect and contribute to new patterns of poverty and inequality, revealing patterns of polarisation and new kinds of social exclusion;
- Normative issues are often given a key role in explanations of change in living arrangements, and one that is often distinguished from 'structural' or 'material' issues. Further, within quantitative research, normative issues are sometimes reduced to 'attitudes'. However, they are more deeply sedimented in the structure of social arrangements and more deeply implicated in the restructuring of social relations, than appears in much research.
- I have advocated a relational approach, in which social 'structure' may be best interpreted as sets of social relations and claims - some of which become embedded and seemingly given, others which are more immediately challengeable. The stories people tell, then, are crucial to understanding, but particular social locations cannot, of themselves, reveal the whole story. The notion of moral agency as something that is 'done in practice', in the sense of creative morally informed undertakings, is both consistent with this and can help to reveal the diversity of subject positions. It can both inform, and be informed by, new conceptualisation of patterns and relations revealed at more aggregate levels of analysis.
- The notion of new patterns of diversity offers a valuable description of changes but to see this as an outcome of choices and volition is a partial reading of change. To describe it in terms of fragmentation may better reflect theoretical impasse rather than the nature of

change. Diversity needs to be understood in its long run historical context and still requires elaboration of the general processes shaping social heterogeneity, and its meaning in terms of lived experience. Emergent patterns of diversity raise significant policy issues. A risk may be that the welfare policy response is to move to more particularised and individualised solutions: responses to diversity must mean also responses which enhance cohesion and political, as well as social, participation.

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